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*Published in:*  
Personnel Review

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
2003

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Remery, C., Doorne-Huiskes, A. V., & Schippers, J. (2003). Family-friendly policies in The Netherlands: The tripartite involvement. *Personnel Review*, 32(4), 456.

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# Family-friendly policies in The Netherlands

## The tripartite involvement

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**Keywords** *Work, Family-friendly organizations, Policy, Employment, The Netherlands, Service industries*

**Abstract** *The article reports on research among Dutch employers concerning the arrangements they provide for employees to help them with the reconciliation of work and family life. The research not only answers the question of to what extent different employers offer arrangements like childcare facilities, flexible working hours or leave schemes, but it also tries to explain employers' policies. The explanatory analysis includes organisational characteristics and employers' opinions with respect to costs and benefits of different arrangements. The empirical analysis is based on a survey among 871 organisations in the profit sector and the non-profit sector. One major conclusion is that family-friendly arrangements have become rather common among organisations; employers are aware of the fact that the reconciliation of work and care has become an issue for an increasing number of workers.*

### Introduction

In The Netherlands, labour market participation by women took off relatively late by comparison with other European countries. The 1990s in particular saw this gap being closed. As a result, the question of how to combine work and family care became a live issue. This development was mirrored by government policies. As we will show in more detail in the next section a special Work and Care Act (*Wet Arbeid en Zorg*) came into force at the end of 2001. This means that employers in The Netherlands are faced, more than they used to be up to the recent past, with legal obligations to establish at least minimal arrangements to meet the needs of employees who have to combine work and care at home. This changes the institutional context in which employers operate and make their strategic decisions. So far, Dutch (female) workers have developed their own strategy in combining work and family care – by working part-time – with the result that they have largely retained care activities in their own hands. This strategy, however, is no longer adequate or sufficient to solve the problems of combining work and family care, at least not for a growing share of women in The Netherlands. They, and an increasing share of their male partners, need and require more facilities for realising a professional life while having families. In general, in the Dutch culture of labour relations, employers are considered to be important actors in the field of working conditions. This raises the question of how employers react to these



developments and changing institutional constraints. Do employers consider that they have to play a special role in facilitating the combination of work and family life, or is this reconciliation in their view still primarily a private problem to be solved within the family? This article reports on survey research among Dutch employers concerning the arrangements they offer employees for the reconciliation of work and care.

Studies that attempt to explain the adoption of family-friendly arrangements in organisations are often based on neo-institutional theories (Goodstein, 1994; Ingram and Simons, 1995; Kossek *et al.*, 1994; Milliken *et al.*, 1998). The starting point is the assumption that there is a growing institutional pressure on employers to develop family-friendly arrangements and to make them part of personnel policy and organisational culture. The institutional approach is important to understand the behaviour of employers and their responses to social change. Theoretically, however, it is missing a clear indication as to why employers respond the way they do. The implicit assumption in institutional theories seems to be that employers are more or less passive actors, who respond to pressure from different sources. The reasons and arguments why they do so are not specified. Based on this criticism, Oliver (1991) developed a typology of different strategies employers use to meet demands from the environment. Goodstein (1994) integrates the perspective of strategic choice in institutional theory and research. The main finding in Goodstein's research on employers' involvement in work-family issues is that organisations were more likely to acquiescence to institutional pressures, when these pressures were strong and there was a perception that the adoption of family-friendly initiatives would benefit the organisation and not be overtly costly. A number of other studies of family-friendly facilities within organisations have focused on the costs and benefits of the arrangements (e.g. Glass and Fujimoto, 1995; Holterman, 1995; Dex and Scheibl, 1999; Den Dulk, 2001). The reasoning behind this is that employers weigh the costs and benefits of arrangements, and that they will implement arrangements if the benefits outweigh the costs. The institutional environment, consisting of the labour market and the relevant legislation and regulations, is taken into account in their assessment. Research has generally been directed towards the outcome of that assessment. This means that the way in which employers view costs and benefits has not often been the subject of research. In this article, we intend to look explicitly at that aspect. Central questions addressed in this article are:

- Which arrangements are supplied by organisations to enable workers to reconcile work and care?
- What are employers' considerations with respects to costs and benefits of different family-friendly arrangements and how do they judge public policy and legal arrangements in this respect?
- How can employers' supply of arrangements be explained, given the changing institutional context in The Netherlands?

**Institutional context**

The Netherlands is known as a country in which employment has grown strongly over the past ten years (Hemerijck and Visser, 1997). As a result, the labour participation rate has risen sharply for both men and women. As already mentioned briefly in the Introduction, the high proportion of part-timers among working women is a feature of the Dutch labour market. This is particularly true of working mothers. Table I shows details of working time arrangements in households with children for a number of European countries. In Dutch households, the majority (almost 53 per cent) opts for a distribution in which the husband has a full-time job and the wife has a part-time job. Only 10 per cent of the households with children have both parents working full-time, while one-third of the families have a single breadwinner. The number of households where the husband works full-time and the wife part-time is also relatively high in some other countries, particularly Germany and the UK. However, the dominant position of what in The Netherlands is known as the “one-and-a-half earners model” is exclusive to The Netherlands. The political debate whether this “choice” really reflects individuals’ preferences or whether, due to a lack of opportunities, families do not see any other option than to supply part of the care themselves, has been going on for a long time and does not look likely to end soon.

Partly as a result of this increased participation by women, policy attention to the combination of work and care has increased at government level. After several leave schemes had been introduced over the years, at the end of 2001 a special Work and Care Act (*Wet Arbeid en Zorg*) came into force (Staatsblad,

	One earner couple	Male PT + Female PT	Male PT + Female FT	Male FT + Female PT	Male FT + Female FT
Belgium	27.3	1.9	1.7	28.3	40.8
Germany	39.7	0.6	0.7	32.9	26.1
Greece	49.7	0.9	0.9	4.7	43.7
Spain	56.3	0.2	0.4	7.5	35.6
France	36.0	1.2	1.1	16.3	45.4
Ireland	55.5	1.1	a	16.2	27.1
Italy	53.6	1.3	0.9	13.0	31.2
Luxembourg	51.2	a	a	23.2	25.7
The Netherlands	32.7	2.3	1.3	52.9	10.8
Austria	32.6	a	0.9	27.7	38.8
Portugal	26.5	a	a	7.0	66.5
UK	29.8	0.7	0.9	40.0	28.6

**Table I.**  
Combinations of parent couple households by working time arrangement (2000)

**Notes:**  
Ireland: 1997; L, UK: 1999  
a No reliable data available  
**Source:** Franco and Winqvist (2002, p. 3)

2001). The act aims at providing employees with increased possibilities for combining work and care. Existing and new leave schemes are combined and co-ordinated with each other in the act; the leave schemes included are pregnancy and maternity leave, adoption leave and nursing leave, emergency leave, short-term care leave and (unpaid) parental leave. A scheme to finance career interruption also forms part of the new act. A bill for (partially) paid long-term care leave is currently under discussion in the House of Representatives of the States General. As for working hours, The Netherlands also has the Modification of Working Hours Act (*Wet Aanpassing Arbeidsduur*), which gives workers the option of working for shorter or longer hours under certain conditions. In addition, tax facilities have recently been set up enabling workers to save salary and free time in order to take up paid leave later. Finally, government contributions towards childcare facilities have risen in recent years. As a result, there has been a sharp increase in childcare capacity in an organised context. Together, these legal arrangements constitute the framework for employers and unions to negotiate family-friendly facilities at the industry or company level.

The above description may suggest that considerable provision has been made to enable Dutch workers to combine work and care. And certainly The Netherlands does not stand out unfavourably in international studies (see OECD, 2001). However, the various statutory schemes are basic schemes with a limited effect. In line with the Dutch tradition of “shared responsibility” (see Hemerijck and Visser, 1997; Teulings and Hartog, 1998), the government has expressly opted to leave employers or the organisations representing employers and employees respectively (the “social partners”) scope to extend (or not to extend) the schemes in their discussions on collective employment terms. For example, parental leave under the statutory scheme is unpaid, and that holds many employees back from taking it up. Some companies or sectors have an agreement attaching some form of payment to parental leave, but this only occurs to a limited extent (Grootscholte *et al.*, 2000). As for childcare facilities, the tripartite involvement of the government, employers and individual citizens shows even more clearly. About 60 per cent of the childcare places are being financed from government subsidies. Parents pay a contribution for these places depending on their income. Employers and parents pay for the other 40 per cent of childcare places. The size of the employer’s contribution can be part of the collective agreement negotiated between employers and unions or – if it is no part of the collective agreement – can be decided on at the company level. These “private” childcare places are stimulated by the government, which offers employers and parents tax credits. The number of places for children aged 0 to 12 has increased by a factor of five over a ten-year period as a result of the higher government contributions (SGBO, 2001). Despite this, there are still only 4.53 childcare places per 100 children, a supply that is lagging behind the demand (which is also rising).

So, legal rules and public arrangements explicitly leave room for and call on social partners to play their part in decisions on and the supply of family-friendly facilities. Moreover, during the 1990s there has been a tendency in negotiations between employers and unions to replace stipulations in collective agreements on the content of specific arrangements on childcare or leave with procedural stipulations that oblige individual employers to develop a particular arrangement at the company level. The specific terms of the arrangement can be decided on at the company level, e.g. after consultation of the works council. This tendency towards decentralisation of terms of employment has shifted the focus with respect to family-friendly arrangements further towards the company level. So, in spite of the statutory framework and the collective agreements between the social partners, there is plenty of scope for individual organisations to make additional provisions.

### Data

A questionnaire was sent to over 3,100 companies and organisations in the (private and public) service industry. The reason to focus the research on this branch of industry is that it has grown substantially during the last years and that it has a relatively high share of female employees. Public administration is excluded since less diversity is expected with respect to family-friendly policies due to comprehensive regulation in that sector. The sample was also restricted to companies with more than nine employees because very small companies often have no explicit personnel policy. The names and addresses of these organisations were taken in part from a sample drawn from the trade register of the Chamber of Commerce. The total response rate was almost 28 per cent, which is lower than the average response rate of individual surveys but comparable to the response rate generally found in corporate surveys (see, for example, Brewster *et al.*, 1994; Kalleberg *et al.*, 1996). Comparing the sample with national data shows no significant differences with respect to distribution of sub-sector and size (categorised in groups). This means that the sample is representative for the Dutch service sector. The questionnaires were completed by a board member/managing director (30 per cent), the owner (9 per cent), office manager/plant manager/town clerk (7 per cent), head of personnel (30 per cent), or by a personnel officer (24 per cent).

The questionnaire consisted of a number of parts. The first part contained a number of factual questions on the organisation, such as the number of staff and the existence of a collective agreement. The questions on family-friendly facilities were subdivided into two blocks:

- (1) measures to make working hours flexible; and
- (2) terms of employment – leave options and childcare facilities.

On flexible working hours, the questionnaire asked whether there are flexible starting and stopping times, part-time work, saving of hours and a scheme for



working from home. In each case, respondents could indicate whether the company had a scheme, or if not whether the introduction of such a scheme was under consideration. Part-time work was an exception, as the Modification of Working Hours Act that was introduced in The Netherlands in 2000 gives workers the right to modify their working hours. So, the question asked on part-time work was whether the organisation applies a policy encouraging part-time work. On the leave options, the questionnaire expressly asked whether organisations have a more generous scheme than the statutory scheme. The schemes covered by the questions relate to leave for pregnancy and maternity leave, leave for partners around the time of the birth, parental leave, emergency leave, long-term care leave and long-term career interruption. Again, the questionnaire asked for each type of leave whether it exists or is under consideration. It also asked about the duration of the (additional) leave, and whether it is paid. Finally, it asked whether the organisation has (or is considering) a childcare scheme for children aged 0-4 and/or after-school childcare arrangements.

This was followed by questions on what consequences employees' combining of work and care have for the organisation, the costs and benefits from arrangements for the organisation, and the factors that play a role in decisions on family-friendly arrangements. As regards the factors influencing the decision to provide family-friendly arrangements, the following possibilities were suggested to the organisations: better image for the organisation, demand from employees, collective agreements, lower absence for ill health, employee satisfaction, social responsibility, costs of facilities, improvement of recruitment ability, possible government subsidies/compensation payments, keeping in line with other organisations in the sector and degree of (expected) use. This list is based on earlier research (e.g. Dex and Scheibl, 1999; Holterman, 1995; Den Dulk 2001). Organisations were also asked whether they had ever evaluated the costs and benefits of facilities in the area of work and care. Finally, the organisations were presented with a list of statements on the subject of the responsibility for family-friendly arrangements.

### **Family-friendly schemes in Dutch organisations: current position**

There are major differences between organisations in the extent to which they have schemes that can ease the combination of work and family care. The most common scheme relates to flexible starting and finishing times: 66 per cent of the organisations have a scheme of this kind. The possibility of saving hours is also relatively common; it exists in almost 64 per cent of the companies and institutions. Just over half the companies and institutions encourage part-time working, while exactly half have a childcare scheme for pre-school children. Of the various leave schemes, emergency leave is the most common, with almost 45 per cent of the companies and institutions having such a scheme. Over a quarter have a scheme for out-of-school childcare and/or long-term care leave. The other schemes are only present to a very limited extent (see Table II).

**Table II.**

Summary of the extent to which family-friendly schemes are found in organisations (in %)

Schemes	No scheme	Scheme under consideration	Scheme in place	Total	<i>n</i>
<i>Flexible working hours</i>					
Flexible starting and finishing times	30.3	3.4	66.2	100	871
Hour saving	28.7	7.8	63.5	100	869
Encouragement of part-time work	40.7	7.6	51.7	100	868
Work-from-home scheme	60.8	9.7	29.5	100	867
<i>Leave</i>					
Emergency leave	48.4	6.9	44.6	100	869
Long-term care leave	61.6	12.1	26.3	100	867
Extended parental leave	81.7	2.3	16.0	100	868
Long-term career interruption	73.6	11.1	15.4	100	867
Extended pregnancy and maternity leave	90.1	1.0	8.9	100	865
Short-term maternity leave for partners	91.6	2.1	6.3	100	869
<i>Childcare</i>					
Childcare scheme	35.1	14.9	50.0	100	868
Out-of-school care scheme	57.8	13.5	28.7	100	864

It may be noted that the top three most common measures relate to flexible working hours. While measures in this area can certainly be of assistance in combining work and care, this is often not the main purpose of the scheme in all cases. And the reservation may be entered that, in so far as flexible working hours make a better combination of work and care possible, the burden of doing so rests mainly with the worker. The theme of work and care is clearly a current issue in the vast majority of the organisations; only 38 companies (4 per cent) have no schemes whatever in the area of childcare facilities, flexible working hours or leave.

What schemes can be expected to be developed further in the coming years? Looking at the proportion of employers that are considering introducing a particular scheme, two stand out clearly above the rest: a childcare scheme (almost 15 per cent) and an out-of-school care scheme (13.5 per cent). Long-term care leave and a scheme for long-term career interruption also come out at above 10 per cent. At only 2.3 per cent, further extension of parental leave is not on employers' agendas.

### **Costs, benefits and responsibilities**

#### *What factors count in the decision-making process?*

As was already mentioned in the introductory section, many authors support theoretical insights arguing that actual or perceived costs and benefits, together with employers' views on who is responsible for ensuring that workers can combine work and care activities adequately, play a role in the provision of facilities. This theme is the subject of our second research



question, which we will try to answer in this section. The dataset contains information on the importance which organisations themselves state that they attach to a series of factors in reaching decisions on whether or not to provide family-friendly facilities (see Table III for an overview).

The items proposed to employers include both factors referring to costs and benefits and one item that expressly refers to the social responsibility felt by the company. It appears that employee satisfaction is an important factor for companies; 90 per cent say that such satisfaction is very important or important. Employee demand and lower absence for ill health follow, with scores of 80 per cent and 70 per cent respectively. Slightly lower percentages are found for collective agreements, cost of facilities, improvement of recruitment ability and keeping in step with other organisations. Social responsibility, (expected) use and possible subsidies are mentioned relatively less often (although still by over half of the organisations) as important or very important. There therefore appears to be a tripartite division in the importance of the various factors: the organisation's own employees are given most weight, followed by the organisation's direct environment (sector, competition, labour market), with the wider environment (society as a whole) as the least important factor.

When more specific questions are asked on the costs experienced by employers, it is striking that the direct costs of childcare facilities are mentioned relatively infrequently. Employers refer much more frequently to high costs resulting from replacing employees who are on leave, and higher co-ordination costs because more employees are working part-time. Approximately half of the organisations experience these consequences.

	(Very) unimportant	Neutral	(Very) important	Total	<i>n</i>
<i>Organisation's own employees</i>					
Employee satisfaction	2.1	8.0	89.9	100	850
Employee demand	4.3	14.3	81.4	100	853
Lower absence for ill health	6.8	22.5	70.7	100	853
Improvement of recruitment ability	4.7	28.0	67.4	100	855
Costs of facilities	4.6	30.9	64.5	100	857
Degree of (expected) use	6.8	33.2	60.0	100	852
<i>Direct environment</i>					
Keeping in line with other organisations in the sector	8.4	25.1	66.4	100	855
Collective agreements	14.9	19.7	65.4	100	837
Better image for the organisation	8.9	31.7	59.4	100	852
<i>Wider environment</i>					
Social responsibility	7.4	38.1	54.4	100	860
Possible government subsidies/ compensation payments	10.6	35.1	54.3	100	858

**Table III.**  
Employers' assessments  
of the importance of  
various factors in their  
decisions on the  
provision of  
family-friendly  
arrangements

A similar, more detailed, approach to the questions on the benefits experienced by employers shows that in particular, employers consider that providing family-friendly arrangements contributes to higher employee work satisfaction (71 per cent) and greater attractiveness to potential employees (69 per cent). Employers scarcely see any benefits from family-friendly arrangements as far as absence for ill health and productivity are concerned; less than 5 per cent of the employers are of the view that family-friendly arrangements have the effect of increasing productivity to a large extent and one-third think that this is the case to some extent, while 60 per cent respond that this is scarcely if at all the case. One in ten employers takes the view that facilities for combining work and family care activities contribute substantially to lower absence for ill health, while nearly 40 per cent feel that they contribute to some extent. So according to employers, family-friendly facilities appear to have more direct importance for recruitment than for staff turnover. They mean that workers feel happier, but not that they work better or harder. Of course, higher work satisfaction can in fact contribute to a lower staff turnover. It is also notable that although nearly 70 per cent of the organisations consider that offering family-friendly facilities contributes to the organisation's attractiveness to potential employees, only one organisation in six states that it uses these facilities to raise its profile.

While employers view all the factors mentioned above as important in their decision making on whether or not to provide family-friendly arrangements, it is evident that in fact organisations do not have much insight into the costs and benefits of family-friendly facilities: in reply to the question whether the organisation has ever evaluated costs and benefits, only 3 per cent state that they do so regularly and 20 per cent that this is done occasionally. Over three-quarters of the organisations have never carried out any such evaluation.

*Who is responsible for family-friendly facilities?*

The employers were asked who is responsible for family-friendly facilities. Are these facilities the responsibility of the state or the employers, or is neither of these parties responsible? In the latter case, it is purely up to workers themselves to create the conditions that allow them to combine paid work with care activities. As has been pointed out previously, The Netherlands is a country of "shared responsibility". The dominant political view in The Netherlands is that the state is not held solely responsible for the ability to combine work and care; the social partners are equally responsible. This study too shows that the majority of the respondents agree with the basic philosophy of the modern Dutch approach to socio-economic questions (the "polder model"): almost three-quarters of the organisations believe that employers and the state are jointly responsible for ensuring that workers are able to combine their work properly with care activities. A small minority (13 per cent) considers that employers alone are responsible for this kind of provision, while

10 per cent feel that the responsibility lies exclusively with the workers themselves. However, what government should do and what mainly concerns employers depends on the type of facility. Childcare facilities and out-of-school care are viewed primarily as a state responsibility. At a discussion of the survey results, a number of employers stated that childcare facilities should be just as normal as primary education and health care. These facilities are provided by the state, so why should childcare not be? Equally, there is a tendency to look primarily to the state on leave schemes: one-third of the respondents do not see themselves as the players with primary responsibility for long-term paid care leave and paid parental leave, while 40 per cent think that employers and the state bear joint responsibility in these matters. The situation is different for short-term care leave. Here, the employers clearly see themselves as having primary responsibility. This is even more the case where schemes relating to working hours are concerned. More than 60 per cent of the respondents place responsibility exclusively with the employer for part-time work and variable working hours. And while a third of respondents consider that the state also has a role to play in these matters, this should definitely be in combination with employers. It is clear that employers do not want the state to interfere in practical matters, such as schemes on working hours. The argument is that “the state must not usurp the employer’s position and try to make detailed rules on what happens on the shop floor”.

These outcomes are thrown into still higher relief when we look at the roles that employers ascribe to themselves in more abstract terms on work and care issues. At a discussion of the survey results several employers characterise their own positions as “following” and pragmatic. While they will not themselves take any initiatives in the area of work and care, they will look on them favourably if the situation is evidently such that work-care provisions are necessary to obtain and retain good staff. However, employers are generally declared opponents of arrangements that are excessively collective, and therefore in their view rigid. They prefer to see family-friendly facilities that are tailored to the individual situation. Customised provision also gives employers the opportunity to do a bit more for good and valuable employees.

Also, for most employers a benevolent and pragmatic attitude towards family-friendly facilities does not mean that they want to project a strong image in society in this area. They prefer to look to other matters to build their image as an attractive employer. Concepts such as innovation, flexibility, care for the quality of their own product and attention to employees’ human capital score highly in that respect.

### **Why do employers supply particular arrangements?**

To answer the question which factors favour employers’ supply of family-friendly arrangements we performed multivariate analysis to analyse what

factors can explain the total number of arrangements provided per organisation. Based on theoretical insights and earlier empirical results we included a series of independent variables in the analyses. These variables are first, a number of organisation characteristics, namely:

- the existence of a collective agreement;
- the size of the organisation;
- the proportion of women among the staff;
- the growth in staff numbers in recent years;
- the proportions of low-skilled and high-skilled employees on the staff;
- the degree to which the organisation has difficulties in finding and in retaining staff;
- the number of employees aged under 45; and
- the sector (commercial services, health and welfare, transport, retail, hotel and catering) in which the organisation is active.

Second, they are indicators for the degree in which (according to employers) particular factors play a role in the provision of family-friendly facilities. The following factors have been distinguished: intangible/“idealistic” factors:

- financial factors (see below);
- perceived benefits;
- increased recruitment strength;
- the wish by men within the organisation to combine work and care;
- the support for the position that care activities are private matters; and
- employees’ autonomy in the way they carry out their duties.

As expected, the existence of a collective agreement, which often contains clauses on family-friendly facilities, is a stimulus to organisations’ provision of such facilities. Large organisations have more financial and personnel resources than small organisations, and as a result they can more easily bear the costs of providing facilities and can link staff to particular work in such a way that part-time work and leave are also possible. On the one hand, a high proportion of women on the staff means greater pressure on the organisation’s management to create or expand certain provisions, but on the other hand a large proportion of women makes it more expensive to provide such facilities. Accordingly, the final effect of this factor is uncertain as the two effects offset each other. A large proportion of highly-skilled employees encourages the provision of family-friendly facilities because their human capital is important for the organisation’s continuity. This need for continuity means that the presence of a large number of highly-skilled employees may be expected to have its greatest effect on the supply of childcare facilities, since these make the maximum contribution to the actual presence in the workplace of employees

with care activities. While part-time work and leave prevent highly-skilled employees having to give up their jobs because of care activities, from the organisation's perspective they have the disadvantage that they place restrictions on the deployment of the employees making use of the facility. A large proportion of easily replaceable low-skilled employees does not provide employers with any incentive to make family-friendly provision available. Growth in staff numbers is an indicator for the organisation's current position; whereas contraction will rapidly place pressure on the resources for family-friendly facilities, growth will often be accompanied by more readily available resources, also for family-friendly facilities. In addition, growth in staff numbers is often accompanied by a fall in average age. A larger proportion of employees aged under 45 will cause an increase in the need for family-friendly facilities, first, because there are more people with young children in that age group, and second, because the wish to combine family and work is stronger in younger-generation employees than in older generations. Difficulties in finding and retaining staff may be a reason for offering additional facilities to combine work and care activities, as well as a consequence of the previous lack of such facilities. In the light of the suggested causal relationship, we expect labour market shortages to have a positive effect on the supply of childcare facilities. If there is already a shortage of staff, an organisation will be less inclined to make leave facilities available for current employees or to encourage part-time work; however the provision of such facilities can provide a stimulus to the recruitment of new staff, and as a result, the final effect on the total number of facilities is uncertain. The branch of industry within which an organisation is active is an indicator both for the tradition within that industry – transport, retail and hotel and catering traditionally have few family-friendly facilities, although there is a great deal of part-time work – and, e.g. for profitability, which is high in commercial services and low in hotels and catering. In addition, the hotel and catering industry has a large proportion of flexible employees, and therefore relatively loose ties between the organisation and parts of its staff. In commercial services and the health and welfare sector we expect a relatively good supply of family-friendly facilities, with the emphasis on childcare provision in commercial services and on leave in health and welfare. By contrast, we expect few provisions in hotels and catering.

Organisations where “intangible” factors are a significant consideration in the decision making on family-friendly facilities may be expected to provide more facilities. Considerations that do not affect the organisation's own immediate interests but for example the interests of part of its workforce will also play a role. Where financial factors are important, this will generally have a negative effect on the provision, or else organisations will be more selective in what they offer and to whom. The supply of family-friendly facilities will increase in proportion to the benefits perceived by employers. This applies equally if employers believe they have a positive effect on their recruitment,

and if more men state that they want to combine work and family duties. The more organisations see family care activities as private matters, the less inclined they will be to make efforts in this area. If employers state that employees are relatively autonomous in the performance of their work, this may be seen as an indicator of the organisation's "modernity". "Modern" organisations may be expected to provide more facilities than traditional organisations. More specifically, greater autonomy for staff will have a positive effect on the promotion of part-time work and leave schemes in particular; employees will then be expected to take on the main burden of the additional co-ordination themselves.

It has been discussed above how various factors relating to the costs and benefits of facilities may play a role in decisions whether to provide family-friendly facilities. Factor analysis has been used to investigate whether different dimensions can be distinguished in these factors, or in other words whether particular factors occur in combination. That does in fact prove to be the case: the ten factors listed in the questionnaire can be reduced to two dimensions (see also Table III). The first dimension covers the factors of the organisation's image, employee demand, lower absence for ill health, employee satisfaction, social responsibility and improvement of recruitment ability. All these factors relate to some extent to an interest going beyond the organisation's immediate or short-term interests. We have called this dimension "intangible factors" in the analysis. The internal consistency of the dimension can be described as good ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ). The second dimension covers the following factors:

- costs of facilities;
- possible government subsidies/compensation payments;
- degree of (expected) use; and
- keeping in step with other organisations.

These factors relate mainly to the organisation's immediate or short-term interests. We have called this dimension "financial factors"; once again, the internal consistency of the dimension can be described as good ( $\alpha = 0.68$ ). Organisations scoring high on this dimension find these costs important or very important in decisions on whether to provide family-friendly facilities. The two dimensions have been used as two independent variables; for this purpose, the scores on the variables have been added together and divided by the total number of variables.

A factor analysis was also carried out to investigate whether dimensions can be distinguished in the benefits of family-friendly facilities. This shows that the scores on the various items form a single dimension. The internal consistency can be described as good ( $\alpha = 0.86$ ). That is, organisations with high scores on these variables see benefits from the provision of family-friendly facilities. Effectively, this means that if organisations see benefits, they see



them in all the areas mentioned. A single “benefits” variable, consisting of the average score for the six answers, has therefore been constructed.

Table IV shows that a substantial part (almost 40 per cent) of the variation in the number of work-share schemes per organisation can be explained with the assessed model. Large organisations (over 250 employees) have more family-friendly schemes than small organisations. This is also true of organisations with a higher proportion of women and a higher proportion of highly-skilled staff, and also where there is a collective agreement. By contrast, organisations with a high proportion of lower-skilled staff have fewer provisions. Equally, the greater the role played by intangible factors in decision making and where there are more men combining work and care, organisations are more likely to have family-friendly facilities. The effects found are in line with the theoretical expectation in all cases. For a series of factors, we also find the effect expected on theoretical grounds, but the effect is (just) not significant. These are financial factors that have a negative influence on the provision of

Variable	Coefficient	<i>T</i> value
Organisation size		
Less than 50 employees	– 0.14	– 0.77
50-100 employees (ref.)		
100-250 employees	0.31	1.61
Over 250 employees	1.22*	5.77
Proportion of women	0.02*	4.41
Proportion of lower skilled staff	– 0.08*	– 2.70
Proportion of higher skilled staff	0.01*	3.74
Proportion of employees under age 45	– 0.07	– 1.57
Sector		
Retail, hotel and catering	– 0.39	– 1.58
Transport and other (ref.)		
Commercial services	0.16	0.64
Health and welfare	0.23	0.72
Collective agreement (1 = yes)	0.81*	4.36
Movements in staff size in recent years	– 0.04	– 0.40
Difficulty in finding staff	– 0.12	– 1.10
Difficulty in retaining staff	0.19	1.51
Intangible factors in work-care choice	0.56*	3.28
Financial factors in work-care choice	– 0.21	– 1.50
Benefits from family-friendly facilities	0.19	1.71
Degree of autonomy in performance of work	0.08	0.93
Degree to which men combine work and care	0.22*	2.92
“Care activities are private matters”	– 0.13	– 1.76
Family-friendly facilities assist recruitment	0.11	1.15
Constant	– 0.06	– 0.07
$R^2$ (corrected)	0.39	
<i>N</i>	798	

Note: \*  $p < 0.01$

**Table IV.**  
Results of OLS  
regression analysis to  
explain the total number  
of family-friendly  
schemes



facilities, the positive effect of the degree to which benefits from family-friendly facilities play a part in decision making, and the negative effect of the degree to which organisations subscribe to the position that care activities are private matters. The analysis does not show any differences between the different sectors.

In addition to the above analysis, we carried out logistic regression analyses for three common schemes in order to investigate how the various factors included in the above analysis influence the existence of these specific schemes. The schemes in question are:

- policy encouraging part-time work;
- a parental leave scheme that is more generous than the statutory scheme; and
- a scheme for childcare (for children aged 0-4).

The schemes were selected first, because they may be regarded as typical for the category to which they belong and can make a substantial contribution to resolving workers' problems in combining work and care. Second, there is the practical consideration that analyses of this type can only be carried out for schemes that occur frequently enough in organisations.

The results of the three logit analyses to explain the presence of policies favouring part-time work, extended parental leave and childcare, respectively are very similar to those presented in Table IV[1]. However, in each of the three logit estimates only some of the significant effects of the previous analyses were found. In none of the three estimates we find additional significant effects. This seems to imply that the number of arrangements supplied by an employer and employers' decisions on (these three) particular arrangements are guided by the same factors.

The factors that are relevant for the explanation of employers' behaviour with respect to the supply of family-friendly arrangements include both structural factors (like company size and the composition of the organisation's staff) and employers' judgements with respect to costs and benefits of such arrangements.

## Discussion and conclusion

The research presented in this article shows first, that facilities to combine work and care have become a matter of course in many organisations. However, the research also shows that for many organisations, providing facilities seems to be an issue that "they cannot escape". Organisations are well aware that more and more workers are combining (or wishing to combine) work and care activities, and they are increasingly faced by the fact that workers have been making demands on this point, particularly in the tight labour market of recent years. The research also shows that employers are aware of their share in the tripartite responsibility for the supply of family-friendly facilities, as it has developed in The Netherlands throughout the last decades.

Of the schemes within organisations that are specifically directed towards promoting the combination of work and care, childcare schemes occur most frequently (in 50 per cent of the organisations). Emergency leave follows at 44 per cent. Flexible starting and stopping times (66 per cent of the organisations) and saving of hours (63 per cent) are more frequent, but these schemes are generally not aimed primarily at the combination of work and care, and in practice they certainly do not always actually contribute to easing that combination. In the case of flexible working hours, the schemes practically always apply to all employees, by contrast to the situation for childcare, for instance. Formal arrangements for childcare and out-of-school care (25 per cent of the organisations) are found relatively frequently, partly under the influence of the external requirements laid down for such schemes. Informal arrangements such as those that exist relatively frequently for leave often leave it open who is entitled to a particular form of leave, and under what circumstances. In such cases, the extent and nature of the “entitlements” often remain unstated too.

Explicit cost-benefit assessments of facilities are generally not carried out, partly in view of the obvious inevitability of having to do “something” about provisions of this kind. Having to do something, because – apparently – the world has changed. This argument touches upon the so-called business case, which Lewis (1996) describes as the view that recognising the connectedness of people’s work and personal lives is a strategic business adaptation. The business argument moves away from the view that organisational change is a luxury or a moral imperative, as Lewis argues. This adaptation, however, from Dutch employers to changing conditions, is basically pragmatic. It is not primarily a conviction that setting up arrangements is, in terms of business or strategic planning, the best thing to do. More so, it is seen as the most adequate or sensible response to a changing environment. This attitude of pragmatism does not mean that organisations have no ideas about the costs and benefits. Yet, their ideas on the costs are more clearly formulated than their ideas on the benefits. When speaking about the costs of arrangements and facilities, employers often refer to the danger of discontinuity in the organisation’s work. They relate such discontinuity to both leave and part-time work. Far fewer employers refer to high childcare costs as a consequence of the combination of work and care; here it is “only” a question of money. Benefits are perceived mainly in terms of greater employee satisfaction, and that is also the primary reason for setting up provisions. When employers set up provisions, the interest of their own employees is the decisive factor in doing so. Few organisations see opportunities and/or have the need to make use of work-care provisions to raise their profile, whether on the labour market or towards customers or society in general. No real “leaders in the field” can be pointed to in this area, and employers certainly do not seem to be contending for that position. Their strategy is “to go with the flow”. This strategy – which can be

characterised as rational from their particular perspective – fits with the way work-life issues have been dealt with in The Netherlands throughout the years. Just like all other “big issues” in socio-economic life family-friendly arrangements are seen as a common responsibility of the government, employers and workers (in this case: parents). This tripartite involvement results in a cautious approach by all actors. The government wants to see more extensive institutional changes to enable more women and men to combine work and family care in order to make economic independence available to more women and care independence to more men. That same government knows that it greatly depends on employers to realise the actual changes on the shop floor. Employers that perceive strong political support for particular family-friendly arrangements cannot afford strong and persistent opposition under penalty of undermining the typical Dutch consensus approach. If they obstructed this consensus approach, they would be running the risk of far-reaching government measures and losing influence on the content and nature of these measures. To secure their part in the tripartite involvement and shared responsibility employers opt for the strategy of “going with the flow”.

What is to be expected for the future of family-friendly facilities in The Netherlands? As we have seen, only a business case argument may tempt employers to take the lead on new initiatives. However, given the economic and political tide at present the business case argument does not seem to be a particular powerful one and employers will not be inclined to extend provisions rapidly. Gloomy prospects for the Dutch economy and the necessity for cuts in the government budget may – apart from any political objections – also stand in the way of a further extension of public family-friendly arrangements. Moreover, owing to the deteriorating labour market conditions workers – with the possible exception of some scarce categories such as the highly skilled – lack the power to extract agreement to any extension of provision. This suggests that stagnation in the development of family-friendly provisions within organisations is in prospect for the coming years. As a result, providing one’s own family care combined with a part-time job may remain the only effective strategy for the reconciliation of work and family life for many Dutch mothers, full participation in the labour market will remain impossible for them, and The Netherlands will retain the special position in the European context that it has already held for so long.

#### Note

1. The results are available on request from the authors.

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